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## LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE RESULTS OF THE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINA- TIONS IN LATIN<sup>1</sup>

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In one of Disraeli's earlier novels, *Contarini Fleming*, a study of the development of the poetic temperament, the youthful hero, romantic, imaginative, already in some measure vaguely conscious of his future, is represented as rebelling against his work at school, which seems to him to be concerned with mere words instead of ideas. He leaves the school, appears unexpectedly before his father, a shrewd and able disciple of Metternich, and states the reason for the step which he has taken. The reply is swift and disconcerting: "Some silly book has filled your head, Contarini, with these ridiculous notions about the respective importance of words and ideas. Few ideas are correct ones, and what are correct no one can ascertain; but with words we govern men." This view of the function of words savors of cynicism, though the course of human events seems often to justify it. But we may comfort ourselves by observing that general terms and phrases are not necessarily misleading in spite of the fact that they have repeatedly been so. Only they must be learned and used *vita magistra*, in close connection far more with practice than with theory; for not only do they gain from time to time new meanings to become descriptive of new contingencies in human lives, but the changes in their connotation are still more numerous and subtle. Intelligently used, they afford a reasonably safe means whereby human beings may come to understand one another and live in amity; unintelligently used, they abound in possibilities of trouble and division. It would seem, then, beyond dispute that with regard simply to the conveyance of information from one mind to another

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the twelfth annual meeting of the Classical Association of New England, at Amherst, March 31, 1917.

no subject could be more worthy of the closest and most long-continued attention than the study of words and their uses. Yet our scientific friends do dispute the greatness of its importance. They seem to believe in the Elder Cato's oft-quoted advice to his son: *rem tene, verba sequentur*. But there is no permanent equation, even in technical terminology, between *res* and *verba*. Words and phrases are not simply counters for definitive facts; they develop through use and association an independent life of their own, and the issue in human intercourse is often tragic.

In another way, also, it is true that men are governed by words rather than by ideas, and that the proper words do not always follow upon exact comprehension of facts. We use language not merely to convey information; we use it far more frequently to persuade others to think, feel, and act as we would have them. Here eloquence, native or highly trained, finds its great function. Certainly in the social organism no art can be more valuable than the art of persuasion. Peaceful progress as opposed to progress by coercion—*absit omen!*—is absolutely dependent upon its widespread use. For I cannot bring myself to believe that the unceasing extension of the boundaries of scientific knowledge, of which our age is so justly proud, will of itself insure the realization of human happiness. However completely the facts of nature, in all the possible senses of that highly ambiguous word, shall become scientifically known, different personalities will attach to these facts in any given equation a varying spiritual significance and thus obtain different answers to the same problem. The good will still, as always, be the enemy of the best; persuasion, therefore, will still be indispensable. Doubtless in conversation men are often won to change rather by the subtle charm of their adviser's personality than by his verbal eloquence. But reliance must usually be placed upon this latter, and necessarily so when the spoken becomes the printed word. I need not dwell upon the power for good or evil of this command, not easily to be acquired, of persuasive phrase. It has often "made the worse appear the better reason," blocked progress, or, as in our own time, "cried 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war." For *pure* ideas are abstractions, *pure* thinking does not exist. In relation to practical action ideas are

necessarily specific and are indissolubly linked with the diction and style in which they take form. On the other hand, phrases have wrought incalculably for good, as often in great prose, and especially in great poetry. As F. W. H. Myers says of Vergil's unequalled style, "he has been more successful than any other poet in fusing together the expressed and the suggested emotion; he has discovered the hidden music which can give to every shade of feeling its distinction, its permanence, and its charm; his thoughts seem to come to us on the wings of melodies prepared for them from the foundation of the world." It is indeed true that for weal or for woe "with words we govern men."

I have been led to emphasize in this way a very familiar aspect of our work, because the considerations I have mentioned, obvious as they appear to be, receive today in some quarters slight attention. As Emerson said of his own time:

Things are in the saddle  
And ride mankind.

The training of sense-perception and the development of interest and skill through direct personal contact with the actual objects amid which one's daily life is passed tend to make words seem interlopers. The true language after all would appear to be physical action. We have, thus, something that has well been called "the cult of the passing hour." Yet even in a world of such narrow horizons words are needed to provide a supplementary means of expression and intercourse. And if, because we think it folly to

commit  
The oldest sins the newest kind of ways,

we still think it worth while to study the records of the past, words are our only help, for action is contemporaneous only.

In common with many I have long felt that one of the most valuable results to be gained from the study of Latin was the development of a feeling for language as an organism. We teachers of Latin have beyond others the opportunity to give that indispensable training in the art of the interpretation of language as such, which, when gained in the study of one language and its literature, may then readily be applied to all languages and all

literatures. Our prime opportunity for public service comes to us in connection with the teaching of English. One of the standing committees of the Board is now trying to devise a practicable plan whereby the use of good English in the answer-books in *all* examination subjects may be more effectively secured. The Board has just issued a pamphlet entitled *Suggestions and Aids for College Candidates in English*, and Dr. J. A. Lester, one of the readers in English, has published a list of the 750 words most frequently misspelled by the candidates in English during the last five years. Dr. Lester adds a list of fifty proper names, some of which are classical, as, for example, *Odyssey*. Last June our candidates in Cicero furnished twenty-one *variae lectiones* of this name and eight of *Iliad*, as follows: Odise, Odesy, Odissy, Odessy, Odesey, Odessey, Oddesay, Oddesy, Oddessy, Oddessey, Odydsey, Oddissy, Oddsy, Idassy, Udissy, Odysee, Odyse, Odyssy, Odysy, Odysessy, Odyessy; Ilyad, Illiad, Ilyiad, Illyiad, Illyad, Illiud, Illyd, Illyand. We were troubled also by errors in syntax, as, for example, in the following sentence: "Aeneas had deserted Dido, and having spurned her love she was frantic." This suspension of the participle occurred both in translations and in answers to questions. In many cases the meaning of simple English words was not known. In the prepared passage from Cicero, *igitur* was translated correctly and then, in the answer to the first question, made to refer to a statement which *followed* the word. In a very considerable number of cases the attempts to point out the three contrasts made in the sentence beginning with *ergo* showed that the writers did not know what the term "contrast" meant.

The time is ripe for a concerted effort in which we can and should play an important part. In many schools there is already helpful co-operation between teachers in different departments. As the Board's statistics for English clearly show, the teaching of this subject bristles with difficulties. If our work upon the translation of Latin into English could be closely co-ordinated with the work of the English classroom, so that week by week and month by month the pupil would receive criticism for the same faults and commendation for the same successes from both his teachers, much might be accomplished. One of the groups in the present definition

of the requirement in English includes the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* "in English translations of recognized literary excellence." The prose versions of the *Aeneid* by Conington, Mackail, and Jackson, and the poetical versions by Rhoades, Williams, and Ballard would surely, had they been judiciously used, have improved and elevated the diction which still, as of yore, distresses the readers in Latin. For the speeches against Catiline the rendering of Blakiston is available, but I know of no adequate translation of those for Pompey and Archias.

I closed my paper last year by expressing the confident expectation that Latin would soon become the most successful of the major subjects in which the Board holds examinations. If you have studied Professor Fiske's report for 1916, you have already discovered that this expectation is in process of being realized. The data from which we may draw conclusions were enormously increased, the total number of candidates in all subjects being 10,631 as against 4,941 in 1915. In Latin the number of answer-books rose from 5,979 to 11,000. With the single exception of French, the performance in Latin was the best in the list. Improvement was shown in 3 (second-year) and 6 (advanced composition), in 4 (Cicero and sight) the standing of 1914 was regained, and in 5 (Vergil and sight) a notable success was achieved. We have reason to feel greatly encouraged. At the same time we must frankly admit that the percentages must become still better if we are to defend Latin successfully against its critics.

The tables that I have for you this year are similar in their general character to those that I had prepared after the examination of 1914 and 1915. The first of these tables indicates, as heretofore, the relative proficiency in prepared work and in sight work of the candidates who offered 4 (Cicero and sight) and 5 (Vergil and sight). A considerable number of answer-books in both subjects could not be included because they had already been sent to the colleges concerned. The number represented, however, is still very much larger than last year and more than double the number in 1914.

There are certain significant changes from the results for the last two years. The percentage of those who pass in both parts independently is, for Cicero, far better than last year and nearly

TABLE I

	Passed Parts I and II	Failed Parts I and II	Part I Passed Part II Failed Passed on Whole	Part I Passed Part II Failed Failed on Whole	Part II Passed Part I Failed Passed on Whole	Part II Passed Part I Failed Failed on Whole
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LATIN 4. 1,924 CANDIDATES

Number.....	817	452	279	356	34	16
Percentage.....	41.8	23.1	14.3	18.2	1.8	0.8

LATIN 5. 1,271 CANDIDATES

Number.....	826	238	47	32	80	48
Percentage.....	65.0	18.7	3.7	2.5	6.3	3.8

TABLE IA

SUBJECT	PASSED ON WHOLE						FAILED ON WHOLE						
	TOTAL NUMBER	SUCCESS DUE TO SIGHT TRANSLATION			SUCCESS DUE TO PREPARED WORK			TOTAL NUMBER	FAILURE DUE TO SIGHT TRANSLATION			FAILURE DUE TO PREPARED WORK	
		1914	1915	1916	1914	1915	1916		1914	1915	1916	1914	1916
4.....	150	176	313	72.0	61.9	10.9	28.0	38.1	89.1	87	127	50.6	49.6
5.....	97	120	127	84.5	77.5	63.0	15.5	22.5	37.0	54	64	80	22.2

identical with the figures for 1914; for Vergil, about 20 per cent higher than in either year. The percentage of those who fail in both parts independently is strikingly lower. But the last four columns tell a story that will appear more clearly in Table IA. These columns are concerned with those candidates who *pass in one part only* and owe their ultimate success or failure in the examination as a whole to the greater power of the part in which they pass or fail. One needs but a glance at Table IA to discover that in 1916, if candidates of this class passed in Cicero, they owed their success to prepared work; if they failed, they owed their failure to their inability to translate at sight. If one studies then the figures given for the three years, one notes that in candidates of this class success is less and less due to sight translation, more and more to prepared work; and likewise, failure is more and more due to sight translation, less and less to prepared work.

The trend shown in Table IA seems to indicate unmistakably that it is highly desirable to devote more attention to the development of power to translate at sight. The possession of this power is the one and only sure proof of real control, and if our pupils generally gained and retained it many of our critics would be at least mollified. But to do justice to the amount now prescribed as the basis of an examination covering intensive work and at the same time to read the amount of text that is normally necessary for the acquisition by our pupils of a ready working control of the language seems almost impossible under present conditions. I am myself convinced that a reduction in the amount of the present prescription in Cicero and in Vergil is imperative, in order that the *average* boy and girl may become able to read Latin with far, far greater ease, speed, accuracy, and resultant sense of power than is now the case. As you all know, such a proposal is now in the hands of the Board. A smaller prescription would still afford abundant opportunity for every reasonable question that may be asked in connection with the study of these two authors. The area which requires close attention to details of ancient life is now so large as to demand for its mastery a very considerable part of the school year. The time saved by the narrowing of this area might be spent partly in a less breathless study of the subject-matter of the

smaller prescription, partly in the attainment of greater success in translation at sight.

The papers set on Cicero and Vergil consist of two elements: translation in two forms, and questions on the subject-matter and language of the text. Table II, in spite of its many columns, is really concerned with a single point, the discovery of the way in which the *questions* are handled by a group of pupils that is markedly successful in both forms of translation. For 1916 this group has been formed of the candidates sent by seven schools whose records in Latin as a whole are very good.

In 1914 the percentage of those who passed in the questions independently was for Cicero 31.5, for Vergil 31.8. The improvement shown in 1915 by the figures 61.2 and 46.2 for the two subjects, respectively, was continued, as you see, in 1916. The success in Vergil is really noteworthy, for the figures show that almost all of those who passed in the prescribed translation and yet failed in the questions received in the latter at least 40 per cent. If they had been able to answer correctly two or three more questions, the performance of the group in this part of the paper would have nearly equaled its success in the prescribed translation. Here, again, we have good reason to feel greatly encouraged.

The improvement last June in the handling of the questions was not, however, confined to one special group. It was quite evident in the work of the candidates as a whole. Still, there were some noteworthy exceptions. The combined reports of the readers upon this point covered a total of 1,818 candidates in Cicero and 1,315 candidates in Vergil. In the case of the following questions the number of answer-books indicated after each question received no credit at all.

On Cicero *Pro Archia* 19:

What is the statement that Cicero has made to which *igitur* refers? 1,456.

How does the word *humanissimos* increase the force of Cicero's appeal in this passage? 679.

Explain the allusion in *saxa . . . consistunt*. 818.

Where was the *oppidum*? 1,035.

On Vergil *Aeneid* ii. 771-89:

Explain the reference in *Myrmidonum*. 912.

Explain the reference in *magna deum genetrix*. 1,000.

Where in the *Aeneid* may one find the story of the fulfilment of the prophecy *illuc . . . tibi?* 638.

TABLE II

Subject	Number of Candidates	Passed Prescribed Translation	Passed Questions	Passed Sight Translation	Passed P. T. and Q.	Failed P. T. and Q.	Passed P. T. Failed Q.	Failed P. T. Passed Q.	Passed P. T. 40-59 in Q.
4.....	218	97.7	70.2	72.5	69.7	1.8	27.9	0.5	20.6
5.....	135	95.6	75.6	94.1	75.6	4.4	20.0	0.0	17.8

TABLE III

Subject	Number				60-100				50-59				40-49			
	B	7S	11S	16S	B	7S	11S	16S	B	7S	11S	16S	B	7S	11S	16S
1,722	177	286	361	58.1	89.8	82.5	84.5	14.5	5.7	7.7	6.9	27.5	4.5	9.8	8.6	
1,654	127	182	277	64.8	90.6	89.0	90.2	11.9	3.9	5.5	4.7	23.3	5.5	5.1	5.1	
2,115	174	334	461	68.5	93.7	92.8	92.2	12.2	4.6	5.1	5.4	19.3	1.7	2.1	2.4	
3,440	232	344	483	57.3	79.7	77.6	77.6	16.4	12.1	12.5	13.9	26.2	8.2	7.6	8.5	
4,096	145	273	369	75.2	93.8	91.9	92.1	9.3	4.1	5.5	5.4	15.5	2.1	2.6	2.5	
5,096	129	223	290	56.3	89.1	80.3	79.6	11.7	3.1	8.1	8.3	32.0	7.8	11.6	12.1	

 TABLE IV  
RECOMMENDED CANDIDATES

Subject	Number				60-100				50-59				40-49			
	B	7S	11S	16S	B	7S	11S	16S	B	7S	11S	16S	B	7S	11S	16S
1,089	118	199	262	69.9	93.2	89.5	90.8	10.7	5.1	6.0	5.4	19.4	1.7	4.5	3.8	
927	79	121	197	74.5	93.7	94.2	94.4	11.5	3.8	4.1	3.6	13.9	2.5	1.7	2.0	
1,321	126	258	354	77.4	95.2	94.9	94.6	9.4	4.0	3.9	4.0	13.2	0.8	1.2	1.4	
1,590	166	264	379	68.2	82.5	83.3	82.3	14.2	10.9	10.2	11.1	17.6	6.6	6.5	6.6	
1,103	125	244	329	83.2	95.5	92.6	93.0	7.3	3.2	5.3	5.2	9.4	1.6	2.1	1.8	
1,764	98	176	221	68.6	88.8	82.6	81.9	9.3	3.1	8.7	8.6	22.1	8.1	8.7	9.5	

Who was the *regia coniunx*? 662.

What poetical construction is used in verse 771? 842.

What poetical peculiarity is there in the pronunciation of *ipsius*? 835.

Of *steterunt*? 727.

Tables III and IV, of which I now ask your consideration, are in all respects similar to those that have been so numbered in the last two years. They afford an interesting opportunity to compare the Board's general figures for Latin with the combined record of seven, eleven, and sixteen schools whose candidates as a whole achieved marked success. The seven and eleven schools are the same that were represented in these tables last year. The figures given under the caption B are taken from Professor Fiske's report for 1916.

For three years Tables III and IV have told the same story. The percentages of these special groups are in general agreement with one another, and all far higher than the general percentages of the Board. For some years to come we shall certainly hear much about the work of the new experimental school which is to test the value of the arguments set forth in Dr. Flexner's pamphlet, *A Modern School*. This school is to do its work under the most favorable conditions that can possibly be secured on this mundane sphere. If it succeeds, its supporters will almost certainly claim that their theories have been proven to be sound. If this position on their part be tenable, is it not true that the last two tables justify Latinists in taking up a like position? If the success of a single school in working out experiments under conditions approximately perfect may be regarded as conclusive proof that the things that are in question *can* be done, is it not equally just to say that the success of several good schools working under conditions that are favorable, it is true, but not abnormally so, may be regarded as conclusive proof that the thing in question, viz., the successful teaching of Latin, *can* be done? And if it can be done under favorable conditions by some schools, but is not now done by all schools because of unfavorable conditions, the true solution of the problem is not the elimination of Latin from the curriculum of the schools in which the results are now open to criticism, but rather a betterment of the conditions which are responsible.